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AUTHOR Kelley, Marjorie G.
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ABSTRACT

By examining the relationship between culture and the formation of personality, this paper attempts to define and describe the "culture of poverty." While recognizing that many studies and findings exist which support the culture of poverty concept, the paper also recognizes that there are too many unanswered questions to state unequivocally that the lifeways of the poor actually form a unique cultural pattern. Valentine, for instance, argues that the concept of a culture of poverty was constructed by theorists who cannot escape their own middle-class bias. He also fears that analyzing problems of the poor in terms of a culture of poverty may result in too much emphasis being given to alleged motivational peculiarities of the poor at the expense of overlooking structural characteristics of the stratified system. Valentine therefore recommends, and the data in this report support, a full-scale ethnographic study of impoverished groups to determine whether a culture of poverty does in fact exist. In any case, it is widely accepted that life experiences of the poor have produced different modes of response. Therefore training programs need an imaginative approach which will discover and make optimal use of latent motivations and aspirations of the poor. (JS)

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THE CULTURE OF POVERTY: AN EXPLORATION IN CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

MARJORIE G. KELLEY
CENTER FOR OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION

CENTER MONOGRAPH NO. 6

CENTER FOR OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY AT RALEIGH
1971

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THE CULTURE OF POVERTY:

An Exploration in Culture and Personality

Marjorie G. Kelley

Center for Occupational Education

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PREFACE

The attitude of occupational educators towards the problem of poverty and the disadvantaged during the last decade seems to have been primarily a straightforward and practical one. The fundamental assumption appears to have been that the problems of poverty and disadvantage merely represent specialized program and curriculum problems, and if we simply provide educational opportunity and appropriate training the problems will be solved. Certainly occupational educators can reflect with pride that while other disciplines were talking about the problem occupational education was actively engaged in the development of operating programs for the disadvantaged. Yet in the light of more than a decade of research in other disciplines, the assumptions with which occupational educators have approached the problems of poverty appear rather simplistic. The problems of poverty and disadvantage appear to involve cultural and psychological factors which magnify them far beyond what can be handled by specialized training alone. If occupational education is to maximize its contribution to the solution of this pressing national problem it must come to some realization of the scope of the problem and the many factors involved. Hopefully, this monograph will help the occupational educator to achieve some sophistication in the research findings and theory now obtaining in other social scientific disciplines. And perhaps this sophistication will help occupational educators in their task of formulating realistic and effective programs for the disadvantaged.

This report was completed in connection with the continuation of the evaluation of the Concerted Services in Training and Education program,

and serves as part of the broad theoretical base for the continuation of that program. The Center extends its appreciation to Mrs. Marjorie Kelley for preparing the report; to Dr. Glenn McCann, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, North Carolina State University, for his assistance in its preparation and review; and to the members of the Center's editorial staff for their role in the publication of the report.

John K. Coster
Director

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INTRODUCTION

Among the social forces with which programs in occupational education must often contend are differences in life style, belief systems, attitudes toward work, motivation, and similar characteristics which are usually embraced under the term culture. Since many occupational efforts are directed toward low-income populations, the culture patterns described are usually attributed to the "culture of poverty."

Two major patterns seem to be followed in training projects: Either (1) no consideration whatever is given to possibilities of cultural differences among candidates for training, and standard traditional programs are offered without adjustment; or (2) there is such an obsessive preoccupation with supposed differences in the characteristics of the population being trained that program personnel are uncomfortable and ineffective, with the result that their trainees are treated as something less than human. Neither of these courses seems wise or adequate to the situations being faced by occupational education programs. What is perhaps needed is a realistic review of the findings of social science and an attempt to place these in the perspective of practical applications.

This paper will attempt to examine the relations between culture and personality, to explore the concept "culture of poverty," and to review some of the theoretical bases for such a concept. The paper is designed to provide background material for work in the field of occupational education. It is not intended to offer any prescriptions for actual practice, although many principles may emerge that can be applied to practice.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

There are many factors involved in the complex process of human personality development. However, as Linton notes:

> One of the most basic problems confronting students of personality is the degree to which deeper levels of personality are conditioned by environmental factors (Linton, 1945:xvi).

This idea, that there is a direct link between the culture in which an individual is reared and the formation of his personality, is one of the major contributions of cultural anthropology to social psychology (Linton, 1945; Kluckhohn, Murray and Schneider, 1961; Kaplan, 1961; Lipset and Lowenthal, 1961; Barnouw, 1963).

Culture, as used here, means primarily an organized group of behavior patterns, or more elaborately, "A configuration of learned behavior and results of behavior whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particularly society" (Linton, 1945:32). In more common terms, it is a distinctive way of life. Innumerable details of behavior are included in this phrase, but they all represent normal, anticipated responses of a society's members to particular situations (Linton, 1945:19).

When we speak here of "ways of life" or "culture" we are primarily concerned with the attitude-value systems as differentiating subgroups of people. We define "value" as any element, common to a series of situations, which is capable of evoking a covert response in the individual. An "attitude" is the covert response evoked by such an element. Together they form a stimulus-response configuration called a value-attitude system. (Motivation will here be considered part of the attitude-value system.) Once established in the individual, such systems operate auto-

matically and for the most part, below the level of consciousness, and they are extremely hard to extinguish. They seem to be easy to establish in childhood but very difficult to remold in adult life (Linton, 1945: 111-115).

By personality is meant an enduring, organized aggregate of psychological processes and states of an individual. The only grounds for assuming the existence of an abstraction like personality as an operative entity is the consistency of the overt behavior of individuals (Linton, 1945:84-85). The same may be said for culture. These constructs share important Gestalt properties. "Personalities, cultures, and societies are all configurations in which the patterning and organization of the whole is more important than any of the component parts" (Linton, 1945:2).

The integration of an individual into society and culture goes no deeper than learned responses, which in the adult include the greater part of what we call personality. In Linton's clever phrasing, the individual "takes the bait of immediate personal satisfaction and is caught upon the hook of socialization." Yet there is still much left over that is strictly individual; in even the most closely integrated cultures no two people are ever exactly alike (Linton, 1945:22, 25).

The process of personality formation seems to be mainly the integration of experience. This experience derives from the interaction of the individual and his environment. Experience, then, is somehow assimilated, organized, and perpetuated by the individual, principally as a result of his interaction with other human beings. The results have both common and unique qualities.

If we take as a first premise that the function of the personality as a whole is to enable the individual to produce forms of behavior that

will be advantageous to him under conditions imposed by his physical or social environment, the operation of personality may be summarized as:

1. The development of adequate behavioral responses to various situations.

2. The reduction of these responses to habitual terms.

3. The production of the habitual responses already established (Linton, 1945:85-87).

Attitudes and values are a major part of both culture and personality systems. Some attitudes become so generalized that they influence the bulk of the individual's behavior. On the basis of such highly generalized attitudes, we characterize individuals as optimistic or pessimistic, introvert or extrovert, trusting or suspicious. Since the experiences leading to these generalized responses, which constitute what Kardiner has called the "projective system" (Kardiner, 1944), are largely derived from contact with the culturally patterned behavior of other individuals, the norms for projective systems will tend to differ in different societies (Linton, 1945:120). Hence, it is well agreed among cultural anthropologists that (1) Personality norms differ in different societies; (2) The members of any society will always show considerable individual variation in personality; (3) Much of the same range of variation and much the same personality types are to be found in all societies (Linton, 1945:127-128). These facts have led to the formulation of such concepts as "modal personalities" or Linton's Basic Personality Type (Linton, 1945), to describe personalities which are to be found in various cultures. It is not suggested that such an "ideal type" personality

will actually be found in any society, but only that it represents a mode within certain ranges of variation.

Now just as there are differences among societies and their cultures, so there are obviously differences in life styles among socio-economic classes and, even more importantly, differences in life chances. The latter have to do with the possibilities throughout one's life cycle, from the chance to stay alive during the first year after birth, through the school years--the chance to attend a scholastically adequate primary school, to finish high school, to go to college--to the chance of reaching a ripe old age. All are to some extent determined by the stratum to which one is born. Statistical data on these facts are well established, as Antonovsky's survey of thirty studies from different Western nations testifies (Antonovsky, 1967). Differential rates and types of mental illness and health care according to social class have also been documented (Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958). The question is, do these different life chances and life styles also lead to genuine differences in value systems, or are they simply different manifestations of similar values?

Many social scientists and other observers have found that different configurations of responses are linked with socially delineated groups within a society, such as classes and ethnic groups. Linton calls these "status personalities." Status personalities are superimposed on a society's basic personality type, and the two are thoroughly integrated. A status personality will rarely include any value-attitude system unknown to members of other status groups, but it may very well include value-attitude systems in which members of other status groups do not partici-

pate (Linton, 1945:129-130). Linton notes, "Interpersonal relations which are of such paramount importance in the formation of personality cannot be understood except with reference to the positions which individuals occupy in the social structure of their society" (Linton, 1945: xvii). Heller agrees:

> Of all the variables that the sociologist employes in his analysis, few are as predictive as socioeconomic status. The vast number of specific areas, patterns, and nuances of behavior that vary with social stratum could perhaps be best subsumed under the concepts of life chances and ways of life (Heller, 1969: 249).

"Way of life," to Heller, conveys an image of the total nature of social existence--including the general orientation to basic universal human problems, the goals and values, and the social organization--as well as modes of expression.

The notion of subculture grows out of the concept of culture. It implies that there are groups within a society that have distinctive life ways, even though they may share many features of the total societal culture as well. The concept of a culture of poverty is one postulate of this sort, and it is this concept that we shall examine in more detail.

THE CULTURE OF POVERTY

The idea that a specific "culture of poverty" exists has been widely accepted, despite a few challenges to its authenticity (Lewis, 1966; Turner, 1964; Gans, 1962; Rodman, 1963; Hyman, 1953; Valentine, 1968; Miller, 1964, 1965). This theory is consistent with a considerable amount of empirical study that has been made of the differential subcultural patterns of socioeconomic classes in American society. But there are also many inconsistencies in the data and in their interpretation. The issue is far from having been fully settled. One of the difficulties is lack of uniform terminology. Some writers distinguish sharply between "working-class" and "lower-class" culture, notable Gans (1962). Others use the terms interchangeably. When the term culture of poverty is used here its reference is intended to be to those considered chronically impoverished in terms of their society's standards.

Two competing hypotheses are found in the large sociological literature on the question of whether different social strata have truly different ways of life. Turner calls these the "culture variation" and the "subculture" hypotheses (Turner, 1964:9-10). The first holds that there is a uniform system of values, common to all classes within the society and that class differences consist mainly of variations on these values, differential commitment to them, and differential rates of deviation from them. The subculture approach, on the other hand, makes the assumption that each class is to some extent a "self-contained universe, developing a distinctive set of values which guides its members' way of life." These class subcultures "are constrained by the necessity to maintain working

relations with other classes within a general national framework," but they nevertheless differ fundamentally from each other in many respects (Heller, 1969:250). While these two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, their points of emphasis differ substantially and lead to different analyses.

Foremost among those who stress the common value system is Parsons, who also recognizes the existence of "secondary or subsidiary or variant value patterns" (Parsons, 1964:169). Similarly, those who insist that different classes hold different values do not deny the existence also of a common core of values.

The outstanding proponent of the idea of a "culture of poverty"* has been the late anthropologist Oscar Lewis, who first suggested it in 1959 (Lewis, 1959). Lewis argues that the culture of poverty is international in scope, that similarities among the poor transcend regional, rural-urban, and national differences. It shows remarkable likeness in family structure, interpersonal relations, time orientation, value systems, and spending patterns (Lewis, 1966a:iii). In a famous generalization about the self-perpetuation of the culture of poverty, Lewis describes the situation thus:

> Once it comes into existence it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effects on children. By the time slum children are age six or seven they have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime (Lewis, 1966b).

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*Lewis acknowledges that he literally means "subculture of poverty" but has shortened the phrase for convenience (Lewis, 1966b:xliii).

This notion of a self-perpetuating culture of poverty has been widespread and influential. Michael Harrington in his persuasive book on "The Other America" states flatly that "Poverty in the United States is a culture, an institution, a way of life" (Harrington, 1962:16).* Many pages and many orations have been devoted to the "third-generation welfare family." According to Valentine, who is a severe critic of this concept, there has been a long line of social science writing which fostered belief in a special culture of poverty (Valentine, 1968). He argues cogently that despite the proliferation of work on this subject, the existence of a culture of poverty has not been convincingly demonstrated. He traces the development of this "myth" as far back as Frazier's descriptions of the Negro family in Chicago (Frazier, 1932) and up through Moynihan's recent controversial report on the same subject (Moynihan, 1965). Let us examine some of the data and some of the contradictions.

Lewis distinguishes between the culture of poverty and poverty itself; they do not necessarily embrace the same groups of people. (There are those, for example, who live in poverty by choice, such as students, bohemians, and members of some religious orders. There are also those who are temporarily poor, like some of the aged or those who have suffered financial setbacks but were not brought up in the culture of poverty). It is far easier, Lewis argues, to eliminate poverty than to eliminate the culture of poverty. He characterizes those who live in the culture of poverty as removed and alienated, ignorant and uninterested, uninvolved and apathetic toward all dimensions of the wider world.

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*Lewis says Harrington used the term in a "somewhat broader and less technical sense" than Lewis intended it. (Lewis, 1966b:xlii)

He also endows them with a greater degree of spontaneity, impulse gratification, and hedonism. In fact, he has compiled a list of more than seventy traits that characterize the culture of poverty (Lewis, 1966b). These have been widely repeated and confirmed by a number of investigators and writers. Riessman and his associates list the following "major themes" in low-income culture:

Security vs status

Pragmatism and anti-intellectualism

Powerlessness, an unpredictable world, and fate

Alienation, anger, and underdog complex

Cooperation, gregariousness, equalitarianism, humor

Authority and informality (not contradictory, they argue)

Person-centered outlook, particularism

Physicalism, masculinity, health

Traditionalism and prejudice

Excitement, action, luck, consumer orientation

Non-joining

Special significance of the extended family; stable, female-based household

They also offer a list of characteristic elements of the cognitive style of low-income groups:

Physical and visual, rather than aural

Content-centered rather than form-centered

Externally oriented rather than introspective

Problem-centered rather than abstract

Inductive rather than deductive

Spatial rather than temporal

> Slow, careful, patient, persevering (in areas of importance), rather than quick, facile, clever
>
> Games and action vs tests oriented
>
> Expressive vs instrumental oriented
>
> One-track thinking and unorthodox learning rather than other-directed flexibility (inventive word-power and "hip" language) (Riessman et al., 1964:114-116)

Other traits mentioned by various authors have included: present-time orientation, inability to plan or to defer immediate gratification, great hostility and suspicion toward the outside world and often toward each other, total segregation of the sexes in terms of social activities, child neglect, hence early independence of children, no work orientation, lack of motivation to succeed (Haggstrom, 1964:206-207; Gans, 1962; Lewis, 1966b).

These very lists and descriptions include, within themselves, many discrepancies and contradictions. As we shall see later, data on other socioeconomic classes confuse the issue even further.

Gans is among those sociologists who favor the subculture hypothesis, and he, like Lewis, attempts to explain the existence of these variant subcultures. (Most sociologists seem to take subculture, particularly in the realm of values, as a given and proceed to explain differential class behavior in terms of it, thus making class values appears as prime movers.) Gans explains differential class subcultures as responses that have developed to a common life situation in which people of a given stratum find themselves. Each subculture, according to Gans, is "an organized set of related responses that has developed out of people's efforts to cope with the opportunities, incentives, and rewards, as well as the deprivations, prohibitions, and pressures which the natural environment and socie-

ty ... offer to them: (Gans, 1969:272). Especially crucial to the development of the subculture are the occupational opportunities of males in the social class.

> These responses cannot develop in a vacuum. Over the long range, they can be seen as functions of the resources which a society has available, and of the opportunities which it can offer. In each of the subcultures life is thus geared to the availability of specific qualitative types and quantities of income, education, and occupational opportunities. (Gans, 1969:272-273).

Lewis explains the culture of poverty thus:

> The culture of poverty is both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society. (Lewis, 1966b:xliv).

Walter Miller (1958) also points out that the "focal concerns" of lower-class culture are often useful devices for coping with their environment. But he considers some forms of action-seeking as reflecting desperation rather than adaptation.

Values become closely interlocked with what is commonly called motivation. American class differences in educational and occupational aspirations and values related to the American notion of success are explored by Mizruchi (1964), who seeks to test Merton's theory of anomie that the social structure exercises pressure on lower-class individuals to engage in nonconforming behavior. Merton's well known thesis is, briefly, that the goals of success are held out as legitimate objectives for all in the United States, while the acceptable means of reaching these goals are largely unavailable to people in the lower classes (Merton, 1957).

Following Williams' (1960) interpretation, Mizruchi views values as a group's conception of the desirable. He addresses essentially the same questions as did Hyman (1953) in his analysis of studies in social stratification and the value systems of different classes. These questions are: What is the distribution of success values among the social classes? To what extent do members of different classes hold other values that aid or hinder them in their efforts to achieve success? To what extent do these members believe that opportunities for getting ahead are available to them? One of Mizruchi's findings is that education is more valued as an end in itself in the middle class than in the lower strata. His contention is that the greater importance given to education as an end value by the middle classes provides them with greater opportunities for advancement.

Yet Mizruchi's data also show that "getting ahead in life" was more important to lower-class segments of the population he studied than to others (77% considered it very important). His data also showed a greater "degree of commitment" (Merton's phrase) on the part of the lower classes, as well as greater frequency of acceptance of success goals (Mizruchi, 1964:305). Thus the importance of getting ahead was stressed, not only by most of Mizruchi's respondents, but most heavily in the lower classes. This finding supports the claim of Merton, Warner, Srole, Bell, and others that Americans share essentially similar life goals. What it fails to examine closely is whether these life goals are interpreted in the same way by respondents from the different classes. Mizruchi argues that there is a greater concentration of "material-economic" responses among lower-class respondents than would be expected by chance alone. But the table

he presents reveals that the ranking of choices is about the same, and that it is the highest class that values money most.

TABLE 1. Class and Most Important Symbol of Success as Selected by Respondent (in Percentages)

	Class					Total	
	I	II	III	IV	V	Per Cent	N
Education	61	37	30	26	21	29	63
Many Friends	0	10	17	5	3	7	16
Prestige	8	10	4	6	5	6	13
Job Security	15	21	17	27	24	23	51
Home Ownership	8	16	32	31	41	31	70
Money	8	16	0	5	6	4	10
Totals	100	100	100	100	100	100	223
N	(13)	(19)	(47)	(81)	(63)		

From: Mizruchi, 1964, reprinted in Heller, 1969:298

Because of the symbols of success values, some of these findings suggest to the investigators that those at the bottom of the social scale know very little about those at the top--particularly with respect to life styles, tastes, and other class-related behavior. The symbols of success in the lower classes tend to be limited to what they can see, especially the most conspicuous, concrete goals. Beshers (1961) suggests that secrecy about the meaning of symbols is a means of maintaining a status group intact and keeping lower-status groups in subordinate positions. Socially mobile groups may grasp symbols that are conspicuous and can be recognized as associated with higher status, only to find out they are not the symbols that really count. Another interpretation has been offered by Inkeles, who suggests that people value most what they have least. On the lower levels people still strive for basic necessities; only after attaining them do they seek other goals (Inkeles, 1959).

Williams (1960) makes a distinction between achievement and success. "Whereas achievement refers to valued accomplishments, success lays the emphasis upon rewards." He considers lower-class symbols success symbols unlike the middle-class achievement symbols. The Lynds made a similar observation when they pointed out that the lower classes in Middletown were concerned in their jobs with things, while the middle classes were concerned with people (Lynd, 1929). Lending support to Lewis' belief that the culture of poverty is international, studies of the English lower classes have noted their low evaluation of education, as well as many similar features of family relationships (Floud et al., 1957).

Bronfenbrenner tries to explain the discrepancy between lower-class aspirations and their success at achieving them in terms of the socialization process:

> Perhaps [their] very desperation, enhanced by early exposure to impulse and aggression, leads working-class parents to pursue new goals with old techniques of discipline. While accepting middle-class levels of aspiration, he [sic] has not yet internalized sufficiently the modes of response which makes these standards readily available for himself or his children. He has still to learn to wait, to explain, and to give and withhold his affection as the reward and price of performance (Bronfenbrenner, 1958:424).

The group which has most often been the focus of attempts to study and to solve the problems attributed to a culture of poverty has been the American Negro population. Despite the many attempts to trace their situation to psychology (personality) factors, it has been argued that the smallness of the Negro middle class cannot be explained in terms of lack of ambition (Bloom et al., 1965:472). Studies have produced evidence that achievement values and educational aspirations of Negroes are high (comparable to those of Jews, Greeks, and White Protestants, and

higher than those of other ethnic groups, such as Italians) (Rosen, 1959). The high educational aspirations of Negroes deserve special attention because, in reality, education proves to be less profitable for them than it does for Whites. The same amount of education yields considerably less return in the form of occupational status or income to Negroes than it does to Whites (Edwards, 1959, 1966).

Many Negroes are the victims of what Wiley has called the "mobility trap" (Wiley, 1967). This refers to the structural condition in which the means for moving up within the ethnic group are not compatible with those for moving up in the dominant social structure. For example, at least until very recently, social mobility among Negroes was primarily determined by the needs of the Black community itself, rather than by general conditions in the country. Thus Negro professionals served largely Negroes, and Negro businessmen sold principally to Negroes. Wiley has used the metaphor of climbing a tree, instead of the usual mobility ladder. A person who has moved up within a given ethnic group may be visualized as on top of an isolated limb. If he wants to move up in the dominant structure (i.e., climb the trunk), he faces the problem of how to get off the limb. For Negroes this has been almost impossible.

* * * *

The concept culture of poverty can be seen to embrace many notions, some of which are contradictory. The lists and descriptions cited combine items which have a pejorative overtone with some that seem admirable. Some writers see those in the culture of poverty as hopelessly disorganized and pathological. Others emphasize their survival strengths, which can be built on for a more comfortable life. Riessman has written

on the strengths of the poor, but also notes considerable pathology. Lewis adds to his appraisal of some of the adaptive mechanisms in the culture of poverty:

> The low aspiration level helps to reduce frustration, the legitimatization of short-range hedonism makes possible spontaneity and enjoyment. But, on the whole, it is a relatively thin culture. There is a great deal of pathos, suffering, and emptiness among those who live in the culture of poverty. It does not provide much support or long-range satisfaction, and its encouragement of mistrust tends to magnify helplessness and isolation. Indeed, the poverty of culture is one of the crucial aspects of the culture of poverty (Lewis, 1966b).

But the contradictions remain. The poor are accused of being hedonistic, action-oriented, and negative towards work and education, on the one hand; and persevering, plodding, cautious, and conservative on the other . They are deemed gregarious, democratic, and cooperative among themselves at the same time they are accused of being authoritarian and noncooperative, without social organization. They are said to be very present-oriented with little sense of the past, while at the same time described as very traditional. They are said to be language-impoverished and simultaneously rich in verbal imagery. They are reported to have low motivation for success, but, as we have seen, several studies indicate otherwise.

The poor are said to grow up in an atmosphere of readily expressed impulse and aggression, yet many studies note the higher level of impulse gratification permitted middle-class children in the socialization process. "Though more tolerant of expressed impulse and desires, the middle-class parent ... has higher expectations for the child" (Bronfenbrenner, 1958: 424). Early independence training is said to be related to high achieve-

ment motivation and is considered a feature of middle-class socialization (Lipset and Bendix, 1962). By others it is reported to be characteristic of the lower class that their children are often neglected, hence early "put on their own," from which they develop a peer culture that is far from dependent on adults (Riessman, 1962; Gans, 1962, 1969).

Polemics have been strong in defense or challenge of each of the positions outlined, and efforts have been made to reconcile them. Rodman created the concept of the "lower-class value stretch" in an attempt to resolve the apparent contradictions (Rodman, 1963). His concept supposes a lower commitment of the lower classes to the general values of society and a wider range of specific values. In other words, the lower classes are said to accept and even to favor certain deviations from the more general values.

In addition to evidence already cited, Sutherland's data on "white-collar crime" demonstrated a substantial amount of criminal behavior by persons not in the lower strata (Sutherland, 1949). But despite this challenge by Sutherland so long ago, sociological analysis continues to this day to assume that crime varies inversely with social class. Once the concept of crime is modified to include white-collar crime, the presumptive high association between low socioeconomic status and crime must be questioned. At best we can say that the <u>type</u> of criminal behavior varies with social class. It seems logical to suppose that this conclusion could be extended to deviant behavior in general (Heller, 1969;251). In short, all strata seem to accept certain deviations from the norms, but they do not necessarily take the same form in the various classes.

The many assumptions made about lower-class behavior and value patterns may well be due to the sparse literature on upper-class culture,* which is not easily accessible to sociological study. What we do know suggests that, although they are at opposite ends of the social hierarchy, the subcultures of the lower class and the upper class have a number of features in common. For example, the extended family structures of each contrast with the isolated nuclear type characteristic of the middle classes. Another common trait is that both lack emphasis on upward mobility, so typical of middle-class subculture. Tolerance for deviancy is also apt to be greater for these extremes of the hierarchical continuum than for the middle ranges. A certain tendency towards hedonism in both groups has been identified. Obviously the functions of these similarities are different for the two extreme classes yet, both structurally and in terms of value orientations, they produce characteristic likenesses.

There is an abundance of empirical findings similar to those presented here, which suggest the existence of a true subculture that crosses national and ethnic boundaries--just as an international culture of affluence might be established (the "jet set"). Nevertheless, studies have also shown that the poor often accept the ideologies and value systems of the more affluent, especially in a country like the United States, where certain goals are held out for all. Even Lewis admits that "People with a culture of poverty are aware of middle-class values, talk about them, and even claim some of them as their own, but on the whole, they do not live by them" (Lewis, 1966b:xlvi).

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*There are a few exceptions (Baltzell, 1958, 1964), but they are rare indeed compared to the examination given the life of the poor and lowly.

It is likely that the circumstances of their life make it difficult for this group to know and understand the "correct" routes to "success," but that they desire this as a goal has been abundantly demonstrated. Valentine may well be quite justified in denying that the existence of a culture of poverty has been satisfactorily proven, for one of the principles of a culture is the desire to transmit it to the next generation. But Gans points out that this is a major difference between lower-class and other subcultures. "Lower-class women seem to be able to achieve some measure of stability within and through the family. Yet they are not content with the subculture nor with the female-based family, and they try to see that their children escape it" (Gans, 1969:275). People in other cultures by and large are satisfied with them and pass them on willingly to their children. "Lower-class women may not often succeed in raising their children to reject the culture they live in, but they try, and that is a major difference between lower-class subcultures and all others" (Gans, 1969:275).

Herein may lie the key to the whole controversy about whether the poor have a genuinely separate culture or are simply the victims of circumstances, which dictate their adaptive responses, in spite of the values they hold.

SOME POSSIBLE THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR A CULTURE OF POVERTY

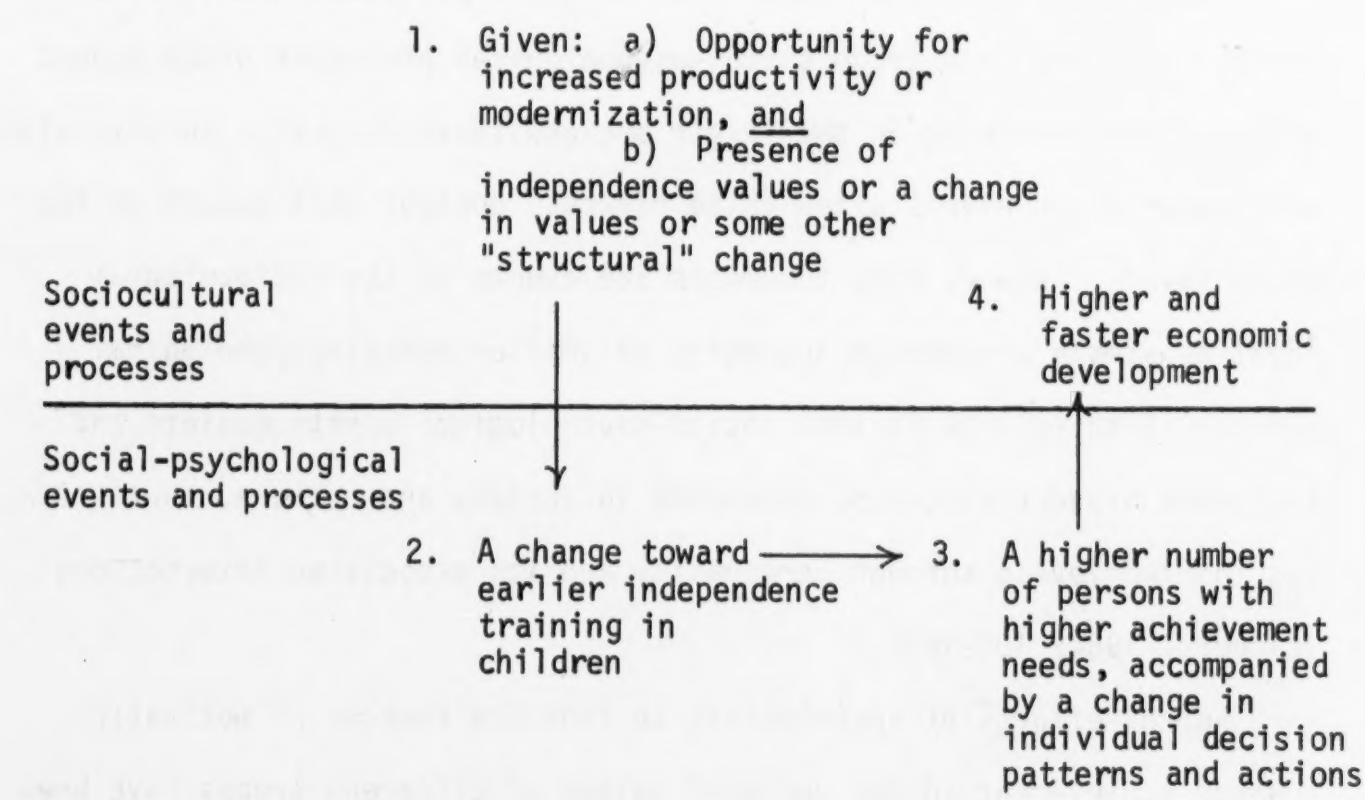
If the "culture of poverty" does indeed exist, there ought to be solid theoretical foundation for postulating such a phenomenon. This section will present a brief survey of some of the possibilities for explaining the concept we have been examining by theories of various schools of thought.

Social psychologists study recurrent processes, such as socialization, attitude development and change, perception and interpretation of social events, group formation, and communication. These processes occur not only at the social-psychological level, but also at the sociocultural level. One of the central problems for social psychologists is the relation between these two levels (Lambert, 1964:106-107).

There are three major ways in which these processes are linked. First, individual and group social-psychological processes often depend on processes occurring in the larger sociocultural context. Society-wide developments and events often quite directly control what occurs on the micro-level. Second, many theorists see events at the sociocultural level as simply a summated accretion of smaller social-psychological events. A third view is that social-psychological events mediate and integrate broader processes occurring in society and culture, thus uniting the two levels through personality and its associated interactions (Lambert, 1964; 106-108).

Recent efforts of sociologists to find the sources of motivation towards achievement in the cultural values of different groups have been paralleled by the work of psychologists who seek the sources of motivation

to achieve in personality. The work of McClelland and his associates (1953, 1961) is especially well known in this area and is an example of the linkage of social-psychological and sociocultural levels through personality. Through the use of projective and content analysis techniques, they have attempted to analyze the strength of a "need for achievement." Fictional and fantasy materials are scored for this purpose. McClelland has put forth the view that individual need for achievement is linked with national economic development through early independence training in the socialization process. He thus makes a national sociocultural process essentially a social-psychological matter. In other words, national development occurs in the presence of sufficiently shared individual values related to achievement. This is reminiscent of the idea of modal personality discussed earlier. The concept can be diagrammed in the following schema:


1. Given: a) Opportunity for increased productivity or modernization, and
b) Presence of independence values or a change in values or some other "structural" change
Sociocultural events and processes
4. Higher and faster economic development
Social-psychological events and processes
2. A change toward earlier independence training in children
3. A higher number of persons with higher achievement needs, accompanied by a change in individual decision patterns and actions

From: Lambert, 1964:109, Figure B.

This kind of theoretical model leans heavily on both psychoanalytic theories concerning child-rearing practices and on role models arising out of role theory.

There is other evidence that achievement motive is a true personality component deriving largely from childhood experiences. Havighurst found that upwardly mobile persons do not find relaxation in leisure-time activities. They "play" in much the same striving, energetic manner in which they approach work and other areas of life (Havighurst, 1957:158).

The relations between motivation for achievement deriving from personality structure and motivation deriving directly from social structure remain to be investigated, but these recent explorations in psychology constitute a promising line of research to supplement the sociological analysis of the relation of mobility to structural factors such as class or ethnic background. Such studies may enable us to specify how different positions in the social structure may affect family behavior, and child-rearing practices in particular.

The capacity to leave behind an early environment and to adapt to a new one is also required for social mobility. This capacity is probably related to personality, too. The socially mobile among business leaders show an unusual capacity to break away from those who are liabilities and form relationships with those who can help them (Warner and Abegglen, 1955: 59-64).

The linking of sociocultural systems with social-psychological ones has also been attempted through the study of expressive models, which include such things as games, folklore, and personal styles (Roberts and Sutton-Smith, 1962). These efforts are most relevant to the study of

the culture of poverty, since many of the traits associated with this subculture are precisely of the nature of expressive styles and of the value orientations toward major life processes that are reflected by them.

For example, one of the attributes of personalities in the culture of poverty is said to be "physicalism," with a strong emphasis on competitive physical games and physical action. According to Roberts and Sutton-Smith's theory, these are preferred where achievement pressures are high (Lambert, 1964:113). This raises some interesting questions, since low achievement need is also attributed to the culture of poverty, although, as we have seen, some studies have refuted this claim. Addiction to games of chance is also commonly associated with the culture of poverty ("numbers" games, football pools, cards, and dice). But Roberts and Sutton-Smith relate games of chance to responsibility training, and the poor are rarely credited with that quality. It could, perhaps, be argued that this theory holds these game models to be socialization devices, and that some individuals and groups remain fixated at these learning stages, never resolving the conflicts these mechanisms are supposed to deal with. Adult emphasis on games may also be a device for lessening anxiety created by conflict over achievement behavior.

Gestalt psychology contributes to an interpretation of the patterned behavior conceived to represent the culture of poverty. "The meaning of the behavior of an individual will be very much influenced by his perceived social role and by the perceived social context or frame of reference in which it occurs" (Deutsch and Krauss, 1965:16-17). Although the literature relating to the influence of social class on perception is very

sparse, the life of the poor is uncertain, insecure, and fraught with dangers, as data on life chances reveal. There is little to wonder at, then, if the members of this group perceive the world as hostile and themselves as powerless, live for the present, and seek excitement to break the grinding dullness of poverty. They have organized their perceptions to make the best fit to reality as they experience it. "Perceptual organization tends to be as good as the prevailing conditions allow" (Deutsch and Krauss, 1965:28). Behavior patterns follow perception of the situation. Cynthia Deutsch specifies this process more fully:

> Life conditions--including current situation, past experience, cultural and socioeconomic factors ... influence perceptual processes through their influence on the amount and variety of stimuli to which an individual is exposed, and through influencing the nature and amount of practice an individual gets in learning to discriminate stimuli from each other (Deutsch, Katz, and Jensen, 1968:59).

Experiments have shown that social experience can influence perception (Asch, 1952; Sherif, 1935). The perception-personality relationship is further illustrated by some of the theoretical underpinnings of projective tests used in clinical work. The assumption is made that each individual perceives the world in terms of his own personality and the experiences which molded it. When presented with ambiguous stimuli, the individual will interpret it in terms of his own experience, and will ascribe meaning which is consistent with his personality organization and orientation. The way is clear to assume a personality influence on perception, and indirectly, an influence of long-term experience on perception through the experiential influence on personality.

> Perception is an aspect of human behavior and as such it is subject to many of the same influences that shape other aspects of behavior ... in spite of the phenomenally absolute

> character of our perceptions, they are determined by perceptual inference habits [which] are differentially likely in different societies" (Segall et al., 1966:213-214).

There has been very little work on the effects of environment as defined by socioeconomic status on most elements of personality development or sets of individual traits. More has been done in the field of intelligence, but conclusions reached are patently inadequate because of the culture-boundedness of the test measures used (Deutsch, Katz, and Jensen, 1968:78).

Lewin's work on level of aspiration is clearly relevant to the culture of poverty syndrome as interpreted by those who accept this concept. As experimental work has shown, "cultural and group factors establish scales of reference that help to determine the relative attractiveness of different points along the continuum of difficulty" (Deutsch and Krauss, 1965:52). The person in a culture of poverty lives with failure daily; he and members of his group are stamped with the opprobrium of failure by those who follow the norms and values of the predominant culture. The sense of failure tends to become self-perpetuating. As field theorists have pointed out, people are not likely to attempt to achieve even highly valued objectives when they see no way of attaining them (Deutsch and Krauss, 1945:53).

Reinforcement theory is also applicable for explanatory purposes in understanding the possibility of a culture of poverty. This is clear in the terminology used by Lewis, Gans, and others, who argue that the cultural behavior of the poor is a stimulus-response process. Inasmuch as the bulk of social behavior is learned, it is apparent that exposure to a given learning environment will help perpetuate the cultural patterns

of that environment. The concepts of instrumental conditioning, especially as they deal with escape and avoidance behavior (Shaw and Costanzo, 1970:25), seem relevant also to the notion of a culture of poverty. The role of imitation in the acquisition of behavior applies to deviant as well as conforming behavior, as Bandura and Walters have demonstrated (Deutsch and Krauss, 1945:95).

Cognitive theory is relevant, since there has been much discussion of the "cognitive style" of those in the culture of poverty. They are said to have distinctive ways of learning and of conceptualizing (see p.10). The roles of perception, learning, and motivation undoubtedly need more study if the existence of a genuine culture of poverty is to be firmly established, although a considerable amount of attention has already been given to these factors (Deutsch, Katz, and Jensen, 1968; Riessman, Cohen, and Pearl, 1964).

It would be expected that if the situation of the poor is as unsatisfying as most observers maintain, there would be a tremendous amount of frustration engendered. Not surprisingly, then, we find aggression mentioned in all the descriptions of the personality and culture of the deprived. Freudian theory sheds much light on these as well as on other projective processes associated with the culture of poverty. Indeed, the very procedures usually employed to study value systems, especially those deemed deviant from the general norms, rely on tapping unconscious motivations and defense systems. It was the hope of reaching into "unconscious" or "socially unacceptable" aspects of the personality that led to the development of projective testing.

Maternal deprivation and early childhood traumas of the poor can probably best be analyzed within a Freudian framework. But this should

be done with the caution that much behavior must be understood in reference to the cultural context in which it is expressed rather than through the judgment of another cultural pattern, say, the middle-class one. This produces a rather circular argument, to be sure, but that is the nature of the relationship between culture and personality. It is rather from some of the neo-Freudians than from classical Freudian theory that much useful interpretation can be derived. Fromm, for example, reminds us once again that "Man's nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product" (Deutsch and Krauss, 1945:137).

Much of the work by cultural anthropologists on culture and personality owes a heavy debt to Freudian psychology. According to Clyde Kluckhohn, psychoanalysis "provides anthropology with a general theory of psychological process that was susceptible of cross-cultural testing by empirical means and with clues that might be investigated as to the psychological causes of cultural phenomena" (Kluckhohn, 1954:964).

Kardiner's use of psychoanalytic theory in his cross-cultural research with anthropologists is based on the central idea that childhood frustrations have a decisive effect on personality development through the mobilization of defense mechanisms and compensatory processes that are maintained into adult life (Kardiner, 1951). Since the child-rearing practices responsible for these developments are culturally patterned, we are brought back to consideration of a basic personality type described in the first section of this paper.

The lack of a strong ego structure is also one of the traits often noted among the impoverished. Study of the ego defenses and of the processes which help build strong ego functioning will clearly be important

to a fuller understanding of the personality that is modal to a culture of poverty. "Ego defenses can distort both internal and external reality" (Shaw and Costanzo, 1970:226). While it is not entirely clear that the ego defenses of the very poor actually distort their reality, it has often been observed that some of the defensive structures built up by those in the culture of poverty prevent their taking advantage of changing opportunities even when they do occur in the larger social system (Lewis, 1966a; Gans, 1962).

Despite the importance of Freudian psychology for understanding the developmental process of personality, perhaps the richest theoretical source for comprehending the culture of poverty, at least in a direct sense, is role theory. There can be little doubt that members of the culture of poverty are constantly enacting roles ascribed to them by their society. This is an example of one of the ways in which social-psychological processes are linked with those at the sociocultural level, as noted on page 21. It is clear that much of the way of life that develops in a situation of poverty is closely connected with the attitudes and behavior of others in the society toward the poor.

On a theoretical level, perhaps the most interesting effort to bridge the gap between psychological and sociological research may be found in reference-group theory, as it has been systematized by Robert Merton and Alice Rossi (Merton, 1957:225-280). Goffman's concept of "spoiled identity" also seems to have considerable value for understanding the role behaviors and personality dynamics of those in the culture of poverty (Goffman, 1963).

As yet no overall sociological or psychological theory has been formulated to explain the connection between ethnicity and class in general. An ethnic group is defined as any group of people denoted or singled out because of race, religion, national origin, or a combination of these (Heller, 1969:375). Gordon has developed a useful concept, which, though rather awkward, lends clarity to the confusion. He has coined the term "ethclass" to refer to a subsociety created by the intersection of ethnic group and social class. Since so many of the American poor are also members of minority groups, it is helpful to make this distinction. By specifying that the ethclass is a subsociety, Gordon indicates that it is a "functioning unit which has an integrated impact on the participating individual." With a person of the same social class but of a different ethnic group, Gordon says, "one shares behavioral similarities but not a sense of peoplehood." With those of the same ethnic group but of a different social class, one shares the sense of peoplehood but not behavioral similarities. The only kind of group which constitutes an ethclass would be one meeting both criteria: people of the same ethnic group and the same social class (Gordon, 1964:46-54).

Both reference group theory and data on role conformity, anticipatory socialization, and reference-group behavior suggest that the merging of sociological and psychological approaches to the study of social mobility will advance the understanding of mechanisms by which individuals and groups reach their positions in the stratification structure.

These comments represent only brief excerpts from various theoretical frameworks which have the potential for explaining aspects of the culture of poverty, if such a phenomemon really does exist. At least,

the formulations of the hypothesized culture of poverty are not inconsistent with a large body of diverse theoretical orientations. This is one of the most persuasive arguments for such a construct. Given the life situation of the socially and economically disadvantaged, it would be almost remarkable if they did not develop distinctive cultural patterns, in the light of some of the theoretical findings mentioned.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

An attempt has been made to define and describe what is meant in the literature by a "culture of poverty." This was put into the context of the relationship between culture and the formation of personality. Some possible theoretical explanations for the existence of such a subculture have been briefly explored.

The evidence suggests that while there are many studies and findings that give support to the feasibility of such a phenomenon as the culture of poverty, there are also many unanswered questions. Much additional empirical study is needed before we can unequivocally state that the lifeways of the poor actually form a different cultural pattern from the dominant groups in society. In this connection, it is interesting to note that, although all observers agree that the very rich and high in social status also have lifeways that differ from other socioeconomic classes--and indeed that they possess some traits which share common properties of the very poor--no one seems to be talking about a "culture of wealth."

It may be well, therefore, to take seriously some of the criticisms made by Valentine. He argues that the concept of a culture of poverty was constructed by theorists who cannot escape their own middle-class bias. He claims that this approach focuses on the victim rather than on the social structure. The postulate of a self-perpetuating lower class implies that people are poor because they want to be, a position Valentine vigorously rejects.

It is Valentine's thesis that most information on the poor derives from sources that identify organization and order with conformity to

middle-class norms:

> Any possibility of finding another kind of social organization or cultural patterning in observations from these sources is confounded from the outset. The reports of life among the poor emanating from policemen, judges, and welfare workers are the domestic equivalent of portrayals and assessments of indigenous lifeways by colonial administrators or missionaries. (Valentine, 1968).

Valentine declares that clarification is needed of the distinction between cultural values and situational or circumstantial adaptations. Not all values are manifested straightforwardly on the surface of everyday life. Even traits that are prized and endorsed according to the standards of a cultural system are not always practically available in the exigencies of ongoing existence, as he points out (1968:7). It is a misconception to suppose that people everywhere live as they do because they prefer it that way. Opportunities to choose goals, in accordance with value priorities or otherwise, are objectively narrowed when life chances in general are reduced by the structure of society.

Valentine fears that analyzing problems of the poor in terms of a culture of poverty may distract attention from crucial structural characteristics of the stratified system as a whole and focus it instead on alleged motivational peculiarities of the poor that are of doubtful validity or relevance. As we have seen, several investigations suggest that the cultural values of the poor may be much the same as middle-class values, which are modified in practice because of situational stresses.

Valentine recommends that what is needed is full-scale ethnographic study of impoverished groups, crossing ethnic lines, in order to establish without doubt the existence of a culture of poverty, and whether it has any connections with ethnicity. His suggestion is well taken, as

our conflicting data and conclusions have shown. Until more reliable studies are undertaken, the question of a genuine culture of poverty must remain moot.

It has been noted that many of the stereotyped notions about motivation, levels of aspiration, and commitment to certain broad cultural values have been challenged by empirical research. On the other hand, there seems to be wide agreement that the life experiences of the poor have produced different modes of response, for example, a different cognitive style or pattern of learning. These findings would seem to have important implications for the planning and execution of training programs and other forms of occupational education. What is perhaps needed is an imaginative approach to tapping the latent motivations and aspirations that do exist among the poor and combining these with methods of skill teaching that make optimal use of the personality characteristics that have been developed as a result of living in impoverished conditions.

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